

DPS policy would halt vehicle pursuits

Some argue the proposed policy is too restrictive and should give DPS officers discretion in pursuits

By Jared Paben
Senior News Reporter

The Department of Public Safety has released the initial draft of a new pursuit policy that would unconditionally prohibit all officers in patrol vehicles from chasing fleeing suspects.

The release comes nearly one year after an incident in which a DPS officer drove on a sidewalk and collided with a fleeing bicyclist. DPS Interim Director Tom Hicks presented the rough draft of the policy to the Public Safety Advisory Group on Thursday.

The draft, which is the department's first pursuit policy, allows officers to pursue suspects only with department bicycles. The policy also restricts officers from following any suspect with a vehicle, even if they witness a crime, Hicks said.

"I'll be honest with you: It was drafted by one of our sergeants and I almost feel it was a little bit too strict," Hicks told PSAG members. "It gives the officer no leeway when it comes to pursuit in a vehicle. It's outright prohibitive, period. You're not going to be engaging in any vehicle pursuits. I'm just not sure where I'm really comfortable without any discretion being given to the officer."

Hicks said the policy, which is still only a rough draft, also needs clarification on when and how officers may conduct foot pursuits.

Hicks said DPS Sgt. Jeff Breno, a former Portland police officer who engaged in many pursuits in Portland, authored the policy with instructions to make it restrictive. Hicks said most police departments are now limiting

high-speed pursuits, but he would like to see some flexibility so an officer could follow a suspect.

But ASUO Legal Services Director Ilona Koleszar defended the restrictive language of the draft. She said suspects tend to drive more dangerously when they see law enforcement following them.

"You weigh this thing of letting a hit-and-run person possibly escape, as opposed to maybe causing fatal injuries to somebody; so it pales," Koleszar said. "I think that's what this (draft) tries to recognize. It does seem very restrictive, but I guess I can see reason why that might be a place to start."

Koleszar said the policy might also reflect Breno's understanding that DPS officers receive less vehicle-use training than sworn police officers.

DPS officers only receive two days of vehicle-use training, Hicks said.

DPS has not scheduled public hearings to garner feedback on the policies, but Hicks said he would like PSAG members to get feedback on the policy from their constituents. No student representatives showed up at Thursday's Dead Week meeting, however.

ASUO President Adam Petkun said the ASUO Executive's PSAG representative, Campus & Safety Outreach coordinator Corey Harmon, will not be available this summer to attend PSAG meetings, but an ASUO representative will attend the upcoming July meeting.

"There'll definitely be someone there," Petkun said. "We're still forming our summer staff, but regardless of what our summer staff is composed of, someone will be there, whether it be me or (ASUO Vice President) Mena (Ravassipour)."

Contact the campus/federal politics reporter at jaredpaben@dailyemerald.com.

DIVERSITY

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The committee, which advocates for students of color in the college, proposed a list of recommendations to the deans in March, including: The creation of a 5-year plan to address the issues; standardized and enforced procedures for handling complaints; and diversity training for staff and faculty.

Education Associate Dean for Academic Programs Linda Forrest said EDAC's recommendations have created "powerful dialogue" throughout the college.

The College of Education — which is ranked eighth out of the nation's education graduate schools, according to a 2005 U.S. News and World Report survey — has many diversity initiatives in place, she said. The school was recently awarded an Interdisciplinary Reading Group Award from the University Center on Diversity and Community, which will allow a group of the college's faculty members to study methods for developing culturally responsive practices.

Shadiin Garcia, student support-services coordinator for the Sapsik'walá (Teacher) Education Program, said problems have existed in the college for years. But an incident during the February Career Beginnings conference, during which students learn tips for future interviews, "brought it to the forefront," she said.

At the conference, students in the college learned the importance of firm handshakes and direct eye contact when meeting with potential employers. When a student of color raised concerns that her culture does not encourage such interactions, a comment by Springfield school district's Director of Human Resources Roger Jordan was perceived to be culturally insensitive.

Jordan said he had explained what he calls "the blemish effect," which is something that might dis-

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Jim Lyda
Coordinator, Ethnic Diversity Affairs Committee

tract a potential employer during the interviewing process, such as cultural differences. He said the meaning was misconstrued and that he did not intend to propose that the student's culture was a "blemish."

"My comments there caused quite a flap at the University," he said. "And that bothers me tremendously."

Since then, Jordan said he has tried to improve his understanding of what it means to be culturally sensitive.

But Garcia said Jordan's comment was offensive. She said that more importantly, faculty members did not have the skills to address the incident at the time or effectively talk to students about it later.

"The professors were ill-equipped to deal with it," she said.

Garcia and Lyda said they did not feel comfortable listing other instances of cultural insensitivity for fear of retaliation against the students involved.

"Because of the numbers (of students of color) and the nature of some of the incidents, it's difficult," Lyda said. "You always have to worry about grades or being ostracized."

Forrest said she's aware that fear might exist, but she added that students have many outlets to raise complaints including the Bias Response Team and with herself.

"What we're trying to communicate to them is it's OK to complain," she said.

In April, representatives from local organizations and schools attended a meeting on campus to address the problems within the college, Lyda said.

"The community kind of joined in to put some pressure on the College of Education to make some changes," he said.

Committee members have also raised concerns that the College of Education is producing future teachers who lack multicultural skills needed for working in increasingly diverse local school districts.

Forrest said Jefferson Middle School has been reluctant to allow graduates or students of the University's College of Education to practice teaching at the school.

"I would say it has to do with wanting greater confidence in the cultural competency," she said. "I think we're working to change that."

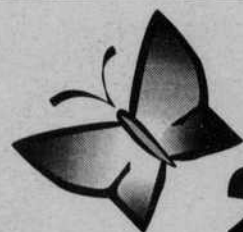
Eugene 4-J School District's Human Resources Director Wally Bryant said the school's reluctance to bring in student teachers from the college was a protest against the college's multicultural shortcomings. He added that he feels the quality of job applicants is improving, however, which is important because Eugene's demographics are changing.

"Cultural competency is one of the things we're looking for in candidates," he said. While he is satisfied with the students coming from the college, Bryant said anything the University can do to improve those skills is appreciated.

Forrest said it is important for faculty members within the college to learn to be more supportive and respectful of cultural differences.

"We need to model that for students in our classrooms who are going to be teaching in public schools," she said.

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